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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MOPS](#) [UK](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: HELMAND: MARINES PARTNERING WITH AFGHANS -- MORE
ON THE WAY FOR MARJAH?

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Deputy Director Hoyt Yee
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) SUMMARY: Additional Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) units have deployed to Helmand Province and the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2d MEB) Area of Operation (AO) to work with U.S. Marines. Last July, when Operation Khanjar commenced in the Central Helmand River Valley, total ANSF numbered about 500 (a ratio of approximately one Afghan soldier to every ten Marines in the field). That ANSF figure is presently approximately 2,500 assigned, with about 1,800 on hand at any given time, due primarily to leave schedules and secondarily to unauthorized absences. More Afghan army soldiers will be needed to partner with Marines in order to clear -- and hold -- the Marjah area, currently the only no-go zone for our troops in Helmand. Marines have established a police training center at Camp Leatherneck, with an initial class of 52 ANP set to graduate in mid-December. Plans are underway to expand this training facility and grow the police recruitment pool, and construct temporary facilities for the forces. END SUMMARY.

ANSF: THEN, NOW

¶2. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) When Operation Khanjar (the largest Marine operation since the November 2004 battle in Fallujah, Iraq) commenced in early July 2009, approximately 5,000 U.S. Marines were deployed into Helmand's Central Helmand River Valley with approximately 500 ANSF partners. In areas where ANA soldiers arrived alongside Marines, there has been more success (Nawa, for example). Helmand residents have repeatedly urged that more ANSF, especially ANA units, be deployed in order to hold cleared areas. The 2,500 ANSF assigned include approximately 1,600 ANA and 900 police of various types (Afghan Uniformed Police, or AUP; Afghan National Auxiliary Police, or ANAP; and Afghan Border Police, or ABP).

¶3. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) With just over 10,000 Marines in the area of operation (AO), they partner on an "embedded partnership" basis with two infantry kandaks (battalions) of ANA soldiers (1,100 assigned, typically 800 on hand); they also have less-embedded or less-formalized partnerships with five smaller ANA units, ranging in size from 30 to 300, and totaling about 500. In comparison, UK forces, whose numbers total about 9,000, partner with five full infantry kandaks. Marines also now partner with about 900 police and border police.

¶4. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) District police numbers remain far below official tashkil (allotted slots), with 594 assigned versus a tashkil of 1,361; most police assigned have no professional training, and corruption in the force presents a serious obstacle to development. The national schools are not scheduled to complete training in the

districts until 2013. As a result, 2d MEB Commanding General, Brigadier General Larry Nicholson, has directed Marine units to follow a "no police is better than bad police" rule; Marine trainers plan to have all ANP within the MEB AO trained via the Focused District Development (FDD) program or at the on-site Marine-run (and Ministry of Interior (MOI)-blessed) training facility at Camp Leatherneck by spring 2010, including new recruits from within Helmand.

¶5. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) In other locations, Marine security efforts have been more constrained by a lack of ANSF partners. On opposite geographic ends of the Marine AO (Khan Neshin to the south, and Now Zad, Bakwa and Golestan to the north -- a 200 km spread), ANA and ANP shortages have complicated our clear and hold operations. In Now Zad, the ANA leadership team sent soldiers from its combat support kandak (mostly engineers, artillery and reconnaissance -- but also cooks) and based only on the personal relationship between the Marine CG and ANA brigade commander. In Khan Neshin, early ANP failings (for example, open drug use) have been addressed but still represent a challenge as more Marine units arrive.

MARJAH: ANA ON THE WAY?

¶6. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) Plans to conduct joint ANSF-Marine military operations in Marjah (a de facto Taliban safe haven located in the Central Helmand River Valley and next to Nawa District) remain dependent on sufficient ANSF commitments. So far, ANSF leaders have not committed to the required three ANA battalions (alongside two scheduled Marine

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battalions). Instead, disparate ANA companies have been discussed -- but none yet formally assigned by MOD -- with growing questions about the ability to train and help prepare them for the upcoming operation. As of today, RC-South has told the Marines to expect eight ANA companies (possibly totaling 800 to 1360 soldiers) of new recruits to arrive in December and January, straight from basic training and group training, in order to serve as the Marines' partnered force for Marjah.

¶7. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) With new Marine units set to arrive in Helmand (the first battalion by end-December, the second by early 2010), the projected ANA shortfall could complicate Marjah preparations. We anticipate the Taliban to put up a fight in Marjah -- a complex terrain of canals funded by the USG in 1950s-era irrigation projects. Integrating Marine and ANA units prior to the operation will take some weeks.

CAMP LEATHERNECK POLICE ACADEMY

¶8. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) Marines have established an ANP training academy at Camp Leatherneck. The first course includes 52 ANP recruits who are being trained in an eight week course (two weeks longer than the usual MOI course). Five recruits have so far dropped out (four for positive in-processing drug tests and one who walked away from training). Marines have taken the MOI "core" program of instruction and added a considerable amount of "core-plus" training, with solid results so far: for example, the percentage of patrolmen who qualified with their weapons was three times higher in the Marine academy than it is at the national academies (98 percent success rate versus 30 percent).

¶9. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) Marine commanders in Helmand and in the wider 2d MEB AO have been asked to ensure that all ANP be trained by spring 2010. The MEB is making progress on this front: when Marines arrived in the summer, less than five percent of the existing police force had been trained; by the end of December, approximately 60 percent of

the assigned AUP force will be professionally trained, the result of the Marines conducting, enabling, or supporting recruitment and training campaigns that added 280 trained police to the AUP force. In Garmsir District, the Marines helped 60 police complete the national FDD program last summer; in Nawa District (former Taliban-dominated area), aggressive recruiting led to 166 police graduates last month; and 52 more will graduate this month from the MEB academy, destined for Rig and Delaram.

¶10. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) Another primary focus going forward will be filling the remainder of the tashkil from 594 to 1,361 police. Helmand's tribal elders and government leaders often remark that with improved (and sustained) security, more "Sons of Helmand" would be encouraged to join the ANSF. While the Marines have generated traction in recruiting and training, the inherent challenges suggest that filling the tashkil with all-professionally trained patrolmen is probably still several months away -- and dependent upon keeping Marine units anchored in strategic districts (Nawa, Garmsir). That said, the police academy at Camp Leatherneck will continue to recruit and professionally train basic policemen as we look to achieve full tashkil in conjunction with districts providing appropriate equipment and facilities to help retain this newly generated police force.

ARRIVAL OF NEW ANA CORPS

¶11. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) RC-South has informed 2d MEB that the MOD intends to create a new ANA corps (the 215 Corps) to operate in Helmand and Nimruz Provinces, and to partner largely (but not entirely) with Task Force Leatherneck. As currently planned, 215 Corps would be structured with a headquarters element and three brigades. Each brigade would include a brigade headquarters, three infantry kandaks, a combat service support kandak, and a garrison support unit. The Corps HQ and two of the three brigades would partner with TFL; the third brigade (rebadged from one that is currently part of 205 Corps) would partner with Task Force Helmand (UK forces). At full tashkil, the Marine-slated partners would total approximately 6,782 Afghan soldiers; more likely, however, the Corps would be fielded at approximately 60 percent strength, netting roughly 4,000 ANA soldiers in the Marine AO partnered with Task Force

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Leatherneck. The soldiers would be fresh out of their basic training and follow-on group training. The Corps would arrive in phases from January 2010 through April 2010. Many aspects of this plan remain subject to final decision by the MOD, including the location of the Corps HQ at Camp Shorabak (adjacent to Camp Leatherneck/Bastion), the assignment of Task Force Leatherneck as the second brigade's partner, the timing, and whether the planned Marjah force of 800-1360 will be integrated into the 215 Corps or be in addition to it.

COMMENT

¶12. (CONFIDENTIAL//REL US ISAF NATO) Steady and more reliable growth of ANSF in Helmand Province and the Marine AO will become increasingly important as new U.S. Marine units deploy in coming weeks, leading to a projected doubling from approximately 11,000 current Marines in southern Afghanistan to just under 20,000 by spring 2010. Helmand residents in focused districts have welcomed the improved security, but openly stress the importance of more ANA units operating alongside Marines. The planned operation in Marjah will be a test of emerging ANA capabilities. Absent sufficient ANSF dedicated to the fight, however, Marjah risks becoming a (repeat) U.S.-dominated operation. This would come at a time when Afghans and coalition domestic audiences are taking measure of how well our stated focus on building up the Afghan army is being accomplished in practice, not in theory,

and in one of the country's most contested areas.

¶13. (U) This cable was drafted by the State Representative to the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) headquarters and has been reviewed by BG Larry Nicholson.
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